

Our Parents' War

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Summary: Movie scene, taking place during and shortly after the first training experience with the Deadly Nadder. Astrid wishes Hiccup would make up his mind about whether or not he really wants to fight dragons.

Our Parents' War

Inspired by some thoughts I had while writing another oneshot. I was interested by Astrid's attitude in the movie, and what the source of her initial disdain for Hiccup really was.

****Our Parents' War****

After his first spectacular failure against the Gronckle, Astrid did not expect that Hiccup Haddock would show up for the second day of dragon training. Show up he did, rearmed with fresh cynicism and a sharpened axe.

The other trainees groaned at the sight of him, but Astrid knew their pique was only half-hearted. They were secretly glad that he was there. Even the most confident Viking teens experienced some trepidation in the early stages of dragon training, and nothing bolstered one's confidence so much as the presence of someone whose hopeless efforts made your own look pretty cool.

Astrid didn't feel that way. Individual achievements meant somethingâ€”meant a _lotâ€”_but they weren't everything. In a truly dangerous situation you had to be able to rely on your allies, and she could hardly imagine entrusting Hiccup Haddock with a flint stone, let alone her life. You were only as fast as your slowest man, and Hiccup's progress had stalled long ago.

One day they approached the ring to find it transformed into a giant wooden maze. Snotlout and the twins loudly voiced their apprehensions, and Fishlegs muttered his, but it made a kind of sense to Astrid. Berk was old terrain. She knew every tree and stone. Not

all battlegrounds would be so familiar, and understanding how to use strange surroundings to your advantage was essential. With the walls erected the ring became an alien place.

Chattering excitedly, Ruffnut and Tuffnut led the way in, followed by Snotlout and Fishlegs. Astrid walked in behind them, scrutinizing the maze. By his distant expression it was clear that Hiccup's attention was someplace else. That irritated her. He'd been so keen to kill a dragon, yet when he was made to do it everybody else's way his interest waned.

She refused to pay him any more mind. Sooner or later he'd give up this foolishness and return to the forge, the only place he made any moderate contributions to the village. He was good at what he did there. Perhaps Hiccup could not swing an axe with any degree of success, but he was fine at making them.

Gobber met them at the dome's entrance and walked them through the maze. Astrid did her best to memorize the paths.

"Stand there," Gobber directed to Fishlegs. He pointed with his good hand to a spot near a corner. Fishlegs went over and stood anxiously, watching them as Gobber steered the rest of the group around the bend.

Next Gobber disposed of Tuffnut at an intersection. He scratched an X into the floor with his peg leg. "There."

Tuffnut remained and his normal smirk wavered.

Divide and conquer, Astrid realized. Could separated Vikings still function as a team?

Snotlout pretended not to be nervous as he sauntered over to the place Gobber indicated for him, somewhere in the middle of the maze.

"Hey Gobber," said Hiccup as the remaining three Vikings threaded between the walls with their mentor. "So what about Night Furies?"

"What about 'em?"

"I'm asking you."

Grunting, the big Viking pivoted on his wooden leg and gestured for Ruffnut to take her place alongside one wall. She went over, spear at the ready and squinting along the maze as if she expected the dragon was loose among them already.

"Nothin' about Night Furies, that's what," Gobber said. "We don't know anything about 'em at all."

The two teens followed him around a wall and down a long stretch. "Why not?" Hiccup asked, adjusting his shield. "In three hundred years you'd think some Viking would have gotten close enough to figure out something about them beyond their lightning spit."

It was funny, the way those two spoke to each other. Almost like equals. Gobber's words to Hiccup lacked the derision or patronizing

sympathy that was heavy in the voices of other villagers when addressing the boy; they did not even have the lecturing tone he often took on when speaking to the teens as a group. Hiccup was special to him. For his part the boy bantered with Gobber in a way he did not even attempt to with anybody else.

It felt exclusionary. It always had.

"In three hundred years any Viking that got close enough to figure out something about them beyond their lightning spit got cooked," Gobber said dryly. "For all we know they're covered in polka dots and have pink eyes. They might be the size o' a ship or a shoe."

Finally Gobber pointed Hiccup to a spot at a crossing. As they walked away, Hiccup muttered something. Astrid couldn't be sure, but it sounded like "size o' a shoe, my _foot_."

What would today bring? A Nadder, another Gronckle, a Terror? Gobber's teaching methods lacked elegance but there was a frankness to them she liked. Sink or swim. It was an approach designed to push the warriors and weed out the weaklings. Except Hiccup had returned. Maybe today would convince him that this was folly.

At Gobber's say-so Astrid stopped and waited in the middle of a junction. He disappeared and a few moments later the Viking raised his voice so everyone would hear. "Count from ten! Ten! Nine!"

"Eight," breathed Astrid. She crouched and focused. Today it would really start.

"Seven," Fishlegs called from somewhere.

"Sixfivefourthreetwoone," finished Gobber in a happy rush. Astrid could envision him chuckling as he wrenched open the bay door. A screech of scraping metal could be heard. And then a different sort of screech.

Nadder.

The deadly Deadly Nadder did not have a roar, or it seldom used one; it gibbered and squawked and screeched.

It was a thing to hear a dragon and not see it. Astrid had read about their keen senses of smell, so sharp that they did not need to see or hear you to pinpoint your exact location. She bent her knees and listened.

The Nadder's colorful head popped into view, comically jerking this way and that like a giant plucked chicken. With a frill of horns and a conflagration of colors splayed across its side, it was actually a rather beautiful creature—but one musn't think that way of dragons.

It spotted somebody and darted forward, scrabbling on _top_ of the maze walls. That was so unfair. Astrid began bolting toward it.

Gobber had swung himself up and was now leaning on the spectator rails raised above the dome, entirely at his ease. He tossed out

advice and jokes with equal measure.

Somehow the Thorston twins had found each other. They zoomed by Astrid, already squabbling with each other, and disappeared as soon as they'd come. Then Snotlout careened around a bend with his mace held high, and he brightened as he saw her. She had the feeling he'd been trying to find her before he started for the Nadder.

Snotlout was a decent partner when he wasn't focused on impressing her. During their tenure as the water team he'd run out with his water pail as though to do battle, and less than half of it was out of bravado. Astrid wished she knew how to direct his concentration.

"So anyway, about the basement," he began, before a spray of sharp quills spiked the wall in front of them. Astrid ducked and the Nadder quickly changed its course of action. Nadders were attracted by movement and their attention easily darted to and fro when presented with multiple moving targets. Astrid tried to think of how best to take advantage of this, but everything was happening so quickly.

She heard Gobber over the fray.

"FOCUS, Hiccup!" he shouted. "You're not even trying."

Odin, what was the boy up to now?

Astrid came around yet another wall and saw him dodging the Nadder. Then Fishlegs, a decidedly more noticeable target than the talking fishbone, crossed its vision and the Nadder hopped after him, whipping its tail and embedding spikes into Fishlegs' shield and the wall behind him.

There was a moment's quiet as the Thorston twins gave the Nadder a pause while standing in its blind spot, a ruse that could not work for more than a few seconds with the dragon's keen sense of smell aiding it, but they squandered their opportunity by bickering very audibly. A sparkling blast of fire narrowly missed scalding their rears. Gobber made a loud comment and then giggled.

Astrid and Snotlout barreled past Hiccup, who was inexplicably attempting to engage Gobber in conversation about Night Furies, of all things. The boy had the attention span of a Nadder.

Exasperated, the blacksmith yelled back. "No one's ever met one and lived to tell the tale. NOW GET IN THERE!"

Hiccup opened his mouth. Astrid knew, she just knew, that he wanted to say, "I'm already in here, can you let me out?" with his particular brand of misplaced sarcasm but instead he said something about hypotheticals and she didn't give him the chance to finish. The Nadder was lurking only yards away, bright head jerking back and forth.

"Hiccup!" she hissed, and motioned for him to get low. "Get down."
You moron, she added mentally.

Finally the boy remembered where he was and crouched down with them. Astrid poked her head around the corner. They had to get behind the Nadder, which had an easy time threading the maze going forward but

could not back up or turn around. She took a breath and rolled with her shield past the open space so close to the Nadder. Snotlout followed suit, executing a perfect tumble.

Hiccup tried, that much could be said. But his tuck-and-roll came untucked and unrolled and he sprawled in the open. The Nadder did not miss it, and his jaws nearly closed around the boy's legs. Hiccup scrambled up with more speed than Astrid would have given him credit for and dashed away.

The Nadder hopped up on a wall and down just as quickly. Astrid double stepped and raised her axe, but before she could release Snotlout knocked her out of the way with his shield, mace at the ready. "Watch out babe, I'll take care of this."

Astrid just had time to gape—"did he just call her babe? _Babe?"—before Snotlout's mace sailed toward the Nadder and right by its head, clunking against the wall and falling with a hollow thump. The Nadder's head turned to follow it and she could have sworn it actually giggled.

She took off and Snotlout followed, bellowing some excuse about the sun while sidestepping the spritz of flame the Nadder directed at his retreating back. Astrid hardly heard him. She raced past Hiccup, who was _again_ paying no attention whatsoever and trying to speak with Gobber. She halfway thought the Nadder would target him, but its attention was solidly fixed on her now. Probably because she was the one actually moving. Great.

Part of her suddenly wondered if Hiccup knew that, and was intentionally keeping still and letting everybody else run around like headless chickens to attract the dragon's notice. The thought made her furious even as she slid around a corner, mostly because she hadn't thought of it herself.

The Nadder was done playing. It had its sights on Astrid now. Walls came crashing down around her in a domino effect as she pounded through the maze, a snapping dragon keeping right on her heels and knocking the maze in ruins behind her. It was so _fast_. _Its_ herky jerky manner of movement had belied its speed. She was running out of space to move forward, and for the first time a hint of fear entered her thoughts. She shoved it away.

A wall began to tip forward before she even reached it. Astrid jumped for all she was worth and landed on top of a supporting pillar, then leaped onto the thin edge of the wooden wall. It lurched forward and Hiccup came into her view, staring up at her with wide eyes as a girl came crashing down from the sky.

"Hiccup!" she yelled, not knowing whether it was in surprise or warning, but either way she collided with the boy heavily despite leaping to clear him. The Nadder streaked by in a blue blur, hurtling into a wall and writhing around trying to regain its feet.

Dust swirled around after the wall's collapse and when it cleared, Hiccup squirmed beneath her weight. Her shield was missing, and upon attempting to lift her axe she discovered it had sunk into Hiccup's shield.

She briefly panicked, thinking the blade had come through the wood

and struck his arm, but Hiccup didn't seem to be in pain any more severe than having the wind knocked out of him. She struggled to disentangle herself, Hiccup muttering embarrassedly. His unhelpful advice was muffled by Astrid's hand pushing at his face. Dimly she heard Tuffnut catcalling but didn't catch what Ruffnut said afterward.

Hiccup tried to push her off. "Let meâ€"why don't youâ€"ow!"

At last she managed to stand, barely catching her breath before realizing the Nadder was doubling back for another go. She gasped and started pulling at her axe handle, which was firmly attached to the shield that was firmly attached to Hiccup. Less than gently she put her boot on his face and wrenched the shield free of his arm. It was still attached to the axe when she gave a mighty swing and caught the Nadder solidly in its head.

The dragon shook itself and wandered away with a dazed expression. Game over.

Astrid stared after it, breathing hard. The shield was reduced to splinters.

"Well done, Astrid," Gobber said from his perch. Ordinarily she would have been pleased. Instead she rounded on Hiccup, who was covering his head still. The maze lay in shambles all around them.

"Is this some kind of a joke to you?" She gestured angrily with the axe. "Our parents' war is about to become ours. _Figure out which side you're on_."

Astrid turned her back on Hiccup's stare.

Later, walking out of the arena with the others (after cleaning up the mess first, of course) she wondered why she'd said the last thing, about sides. Of course Hiccup was on Berk's side, it was only natural. No question about it.

...And yet, Hiccup lacked the malice the others bore towards the dragons. His expression when Gobber was shutting up the dragon was one of odd commiseration, as though he and the Nadder both were playing a role neither was particularly enthusiastic about and they were just humoring everyone.

Something Tuffnut said made Astrid roll her eyes, and they chanced upon Hiccup sneaking away from the group. With one of the arena's shields. During dragon training the recruits were expected to eat and train and pretty much do everything together, breaking company only at night and sometimes not even then. It was a way of building rapport with your fellow warriors.

Hiccup had taken to avoiding them outside of the arena. His attitude was too bizarre for Astrid to comprehend. He had been so eager to kill dragons and now he was clearly just going through the motions.

She ducked away from the others, and Snotlout's disappointed look, and ran after Hiccup.

Did the boy realize what a terrible sneak he was? He was obviously

trying to be covert, but nothing could disguise the suspicious way he hustled through the village, stopping at a warehouse and grabbing a fish from the stores. If that was all he was up to, there was no need for discretion. Vikings had large appetites and frequently raided the storehouse for a midday snack; Hiccup was hardly the only one.

Abruptly the boy turned around and looked right at her. Astrid hadn't really been trying to sneak up on him, but even so she felt irritated at herself. Hiccup's eyes were round.

"Oh, hi," he said breathlessly. He hadn't been hurrying all that much, so the shortness of breath was from nerves. Astrid straightened coolly. "Just, ah, a snack. All that dragon...battling...really works up a guy's appetite, huh?"

"Dragon _battling_ would do that, sure," said Astrid.

Hiccup did not even have the grace to blush. He just kind of gave a loopy grin.

She'd never understood how mockery could wash over him so easily. Except it didn't, or why was he always so intent on proving himself, with his strange devices and untimely attempts at heroics? But nothing ever seemed to get under his skin, whereas Astrid felt like a speck of dust could wriggle under hers.

A joke. Everything was a joke to him. And he never let anybody in on the punchline.

She almost asked him what he intended to do with that shield. Instead she turned on her heel.

* * *

><p>I originally intended for this oneshot to take place after the Nadder training, I wasn't going to write the scene out! But somehow that happened anyway.<p>

End
file.